

HIGHLANDS CONSERVATION ACT

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1964) to establish the Highlands Stewardship Area in the States of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1964

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Highlands Conservation Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following—

(1) The Highlands region is a physiographic province that encompasses more than 2,000,000 acres extending from eastern Pennsylvania through the States of New Jersey and New York to northwestern Connecticut.

(2) The Highlands region is an environmentally unique area that—

(A) provides clean drinking water to over 15,000,000 people in metropolitan areas in the States of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania;

(B) provides critical wildlife habitat, including habitat for 247 threatened and endangered species;

(C) maintains an important historic connection to early Native American culture, colonial settlement, the American Revolution, and the Civil War;

(D) contains recreational resources for 14 million visitors annually;

(E) provides other significant ecological, natural, tourism, recreational, educational, and economic benefits; and

(F) provides homeownership opportunities and access to affordable housing that is safe, clean, and healthy.

(3) An estimated 1 in 12 citizens of the United States live within a 2-hour drive of the Highlands region.

(4) More than 1,400,000 residents live in the Highlands region.

(5) The Highlands region forms a greenbelt adjacent to the Philadelphia-New York City-Hartford urban corridor that offers the opportunity to preserve water, forest and agricultural resources, wildlife habitat, recreational areas, and historic sites, while encouraging sustainable economic growth and development in a fiscally and environmentally sound manner.

(6) Continued population growth and land use patterns in the Highlands region—

(A) reduce the availability and quality of water;

(B) reduce air quality;

(C) fragment the forests;

(D) destroy critical migration corridors and forest habitat; and

(E) result in the loss of recreational opportunities and scenic, historic, and cultural resources.

(7) The water, forest, wildlife, recreational, agricultural, and cultural resources of the Highlands region, in combination with the proximity of the Highlands region to the largest metropolitan areas in the United States, make the Highlands region nationally significant.

(8) The national significance of the Highlands region has been documented in—

(A) the New York-New Jersey Highlands Regional Study conducted by the Forest Service in 1990;

(B) the New York-New Jersey Highlands Regional Study: 2002 Update conducted by the Forest Service;

(C) the bi-State Skylands Greenway Task Force Report;

(D) the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan;

(E) the New York State Open Space Conservation Plan;

(F) the Connecticut Green Plan: Open Space Acquisition FY 2001-2006;

(G) the open space plans of the State of Pennsylvania; and

(H) other open space conservation plans for States in the Highlands region.

(9) The Highlands region includes or is adjacent to numerous parcels of land owned by the Federal Government or federally designated areas that protect, conserve, or restore resources of the Highlands region, including—

(A) the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge;

(B) the Shawanagunk Grasslands Wildlife Refuge;

(C) the Morristown National Historical Park;

(D) the Delaware and Lehigh Canal Corridors;

(E) the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area;

(F) the Delaware River Basin;

(G) the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area;

(H) the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River;

(I) the Appalachian National Scenic Trail;

(J) the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York;

(K) the Highlands National Millenium Trail;

(L) the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge;

(M) the proposed Crossroads of the Revolution National Heritage Area;

(N) the proposed Musconetcong National Scenic and Recreational River in New Jersey; and

(O) the Farmington River Wild and Scenic Area in Connecticut.

(10) It is in the interest of the United States to protect, conserve, and restore the resources of the Highlands region for the residents of, and visitors to, the Highlands region.

(11) The States of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, and units of local government in the Highlands region have the primary responsibility for protecting, conserving, preserving, restoring and promoting the resources of the Highlands region.

(12) Because of the longstanding Federal practice of assisting States in creating, protecting, conserving, and restoring areas of significant natural and cultural importance, and the national significance of the Highlands region, the Federal Government should, in partnership with the Highlands States and units of local government in the Highlands region, protect, restore, and preserve the water, forest, agricultural, wildlife, recreational and cultural resources of the Highlands region.

SEC. 3. PURPOSES.

The purposes of this Act are as follows:

(1) To recognize the importance of the water, forest, agricultural, wildlife, recreational and cultural resources of the Highlands, and the national significance of the Highlands region to the United States.

(2) To authorize the Secretary of the Interior to work in partnership with the Secretary of Agriculture to provide financial assistance to the Highlands States to preserve and protect high priority conservation lands in the Highlands region.

(3) To continue the ongoing Forest Service programs in the Highlands region to assist the Highlands States, local units of government and private forest and farm landowners in the conservation of lands and natural resources in the Highlands region.

SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) HIGHLANDS REGION.—The term "Highlands region" means the physiographic province, defined by the Reading Prong and ecologically similar adjacent upland areas, that encompasses more than 2,000,000 acres extending from eastern Pennsylvania through the States of New Jersey and New York to northwestern Connecticut.

(2) HIGHLANDS STATE.—The term "Highlands State" means—

(A) the State of Connecticut;

(B) the State of New Jersey;

(C) the State of New York;

(D) the State of Pennsylvania; and

(E) any agency or department of any Highlands State.

(3) LAND CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROJECT.—The term "land conservation partnership project" means a land conservation project located within the Highlands region identified as having high conservation value by the Forest Service in which a non-Federal entity acquires land or an interest in land from a willing seller for the purpose of permanently protecting, conserving, or preserving the land through a partnership with the Federal Government.

(4) NON-FEDERAL ENTITY.—The term "non-Federal entity" means any Highlands State, or any agency or department of any Highlands State with authority to own and manage land for conservation purposes, including the Palisades Interstate Park Commission.

(5) STUDY.—The term "study" means the New York-New Jersey Highlands Regional Study conducted by the Forest Service in 1990.

(6) UPDATE.—The term "update" means the New York-New Jersey Highlands Regional Study: 2002 Update conducted by the Forest Service.

SEC. 5. LAND CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS IN THE HIGHLANDS REGION.

(a) SUBMISSION OF PROPOSED PROJECTS.—Annually, the Governors of the Highlands States, with input from pertinent units of local government and the public, may jointly identify land conservation partnership projects in the Highlands region that shall be proposed for Federal financial assistance and submit a list of those projects to the Secretary of the Interior.

(b) CONSIDERATION OF PROJECTS.—The Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, shall annually submit to Congress a list of those land conservation partnership projects submitted under subsection (a) that are eligible to receive financial assistance under this section.

(c) ELIGIBILITY CONDITIONS.—To be eligible for financial assistance under this section for a land conservation partnership project, a non-Federal entity shall enter into an agreement with the Secretary of the Interior that—

(1) identifies the non-Federal entity that shall own or hold and manage the land or interest in land;

(2) identifies the source of funds to provide the non-Federal share required under subsection (d);

(3) describes the management objectives for the land that will assure permanent protection and use of the land for the purpose for which the assistance will be provided;

(4) provides that, if the non-Federal entity converts, uses, or disposes of the land conservation partnership project for a purpose inconsistent with the purpose for which the assistance was provided, as determined by the Secretary of the Interior, the United States may seek specific performance of the conditions of financial assistance in accordance with paragraph (3) in Federal court and shall be entitled to reimbursement from the non-Federal entity in an amount that is, as determined at the time of conversion, use, or disposal, the greater of—

(A) the total amount of the financial assistance provided for the project by the Federal Government under this section; or

(B) the amount by which the financial assistance increased the value of the land or interest in land; and

(5) provides that land conservation partnership projects will be consistent with areas identified as having high conservation value in the following:

(A) Important Areas portion of the Forest Service study.

(B) Conservation Focal Areas portion of the Forest Service update.

(C) Conservation Priorities portion of the update.

(D) Lands identified as having higher or high-cost resource value in the Conservation Values Assessment portion of the update.

(d) NON-FEDERAL SHARE REQUIREMENT.—The Federal share of the cost of carrying out a land conservation partnership project under this section shall not exceed 50 percent of the total cost of the land conservation partnership project.

(e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of the Interior from the general funds of the Treasury or the Land and Water Conservation Fund to carry out this section \$10,000,000 for each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2014. Amounts appropriated pursuant to this authorization of appropriations shall remain available until expended.

SEC. 6. FOREST SERVICE AND USDA PROGRAMS IN THE HIGHLANDS REGION.

(a) IN GENERAL.—In order to meet the land resource goals of, and the scientific and conservation challenges identified in, the study, update, and any future study that the Forest Service may undertake in the Highlands region, the Secretary of Agriculture, acting through the Chief of the Forest Service and in consultation with the Chief of the National Resources Conservation Service, shall continue to assist the Highlands States, local units of government, and private forest and farm landowners in the conservation of lands and natural resources in the Highlands region.

(b) DUTIES.—The Forest Service shall—

(1) in consultation with the Highlands States, undertake other studies and research as appropriate in the Highlands region consistent with the purposes of this Act;

(2) communicate the findings of the study and update and maintain a public dialogue regarding implementation of the study and update; and

(3) assist the Highland States, local units of government, individual landowners, and private organizations in identifying and using Forest Service and other technical and financial assistance programs of the Department of Agriculture.

(c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Agriculture to carry out this section \$1,000,000 for each of the fiscal years 2005 through 2014.

SEC. 7. PRIVATE PROPERTY PROTECTION AND LACK OF REGULATORY EFFECT.

(a) ACCESS TO PRIVATE PROPERTY.—Nothing in this Act shall be construed to—

(1) require any private property owner to permit public access (including Federal, State, or local government access) to such private property; and

(2) modify any provision of Federal, State, or local law with regard to public access to or use of private lands.

(b) LIABILITY.—Nothing in this Act shall be construed to create any liability, or to have any effect on any liability under any other law, of any private property owner with respect to any persons injured on such private property.

(c) RECOGNITION OF AUTHORITY TO CONTROL LAND USE.—Nothing in this Act shall be construed to modify any authority of Federal, State, or local governments to regulate land use.

(d) PARTICIPATION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY OWNERS.—Nothing in this Act shall be construed to require the owner of any private property located in the Highlands region to participate in the land conservation, financial, or technical assistance or any other programs established under this Act.

(e) PURCHASE OF LANDS OR INTERESTS IN LANDS FROM WILLING SELLERS ONLY.—Funds appropriated to carry out this Act shall be used to purchase lands or interests in lands only from willing sellers.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. CALVERT) and the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. CALVERT).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1964.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1964, introduced by my good friend, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN) and amended by the Committee on Resources, would authorize the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture to provide financial assistance to States to preserve and protect high priority conservation lands in the Highlands region. This geographic region encompasses over 2 million acres of land stretching from western Connecticut across the Lower Hudson River Valley and northern New Jersey into northeastern Pennsylvania.

Mr. Speaker, not only has the U.S. Forest Service documented the national significance of the Highlands area in two extensive studies in 1990 and 2002, but the President in his 2004 budget recognized the New York-New Jersey Highlands forest area as one of nine priority forests areas in the country that are threatened.

H.R. 1964, as amended, is supported by the administration and the majority and minority of the committee. I urge adoption of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

(Mrs. CHRISTENSEN asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, we fully support the goals of H.R. 1964. The purpose of this legislation is to facilitate conservation and preservation, ideals we fight for in this Congress on a regular basis.

However, we must point out that the scope of H.R. 1964 is truly stunning. This legislation will create a new Federal conservation program covering 2 million acres and 1.4 million people in 4 States. The precise boundaries of this new Federally created area are only generally defined in the bill, and there are no references to a map to allow property owners to know if their property is included or not.

Furthermore, the goals of this new conservation program are sweeping. The bill states that the Federal Government should work with States, units of local government and private

property owners to “protect, restore and preserve the water, forest, agricultural, wildlife, recreational and cultural resources” contained in this new Federal area. It is difficult to imagine a broader conservation mandate.

Given the ongoing and severe underfunding of the land and water conservation funds, we continue to have concerns regarding the impact of this new \$100 million effort may have on other worthy conservation programs funded with LWCF dollars. However, we will support H.R. 1964 at this time.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN).

Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time.

My thanks to the gentleman from California (Mr. CALVERT), and particular thanks to the chairman, the gentleman from California (Mr. POMBO), the chair of the House Committee on Resources, for all of his work and the work of his staff that have helped improve this bill and make it possible for us to discuss it and vote on it today. I also thank the ranking member for her assistance and recognize the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL), who is going to speak later, as well as the gentlewoman New York (Mrs. KELLY) and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. GERLACH) and over 30 Members of Congress that are sponsoring this bill.

Mr. Speaker, the Highlands is one of the last open treasures in the most densely populated area of the United States. In New Jersey alone, my home State, it includes more than a million acres of forests, farms, streams, wetlands, lakes, reservoirs and historic sites. We need to preserve these assets.

The Highlands Conservation Act represents a major commitment to protect them. While remaining mindful of property rights, this bill complements ongoing State, private and local partnerships that are actively working to protect open space. Our bill does not ask the Federal Government to become the landowner or steward to these lands; rather, the people of New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania would retain ownership and responsibility for caretaking of these lands. Indeed, the government will not be taking any land. Participants would all be willing sellers.

Mr. Speaker, the President recognized the national significance of the Highlands in his 2004 budget message in January and designated the Highlands as one of nine national priorities areas threatened by development.

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These lands, as the gentleman from California (Mr. CALVERT) has said, have been identified by the U.S. Forest Service in virtually all other Federal, State and local entities as critical lands in need of preservation.

This bill represents an opportunity for the Federal Government to work with the State government and local groups to preserve the Highlands. It is a unique opportunity, an historic opportunity, and it is a symbolic opportunity of the Federal Government to work with so many partners.

This legislation also represents a landmark commitment of the Federal Government to the Highlands. It is a genuine partnership. It is important to preserving open space. I am proud to support the bill and to have so many partners in that regard.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL).

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding time to me, and I rise in strong support of H.R. 1954, the Highland Stewardship Act. I am proud to be an original cosponsor of this bill. I pledged that I would do everything in my power to pass this bill, and I am delighted that this bill is on the floor today.

I want to start by thanking the Committee on Resources chairman, the gentleman from California (Mr. POMBO), the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. RAHALL), the ranking member, and the gentleman from California (Mr. RADANOVICH), the subcommittee chairman, and the gentleman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN), the subcommittee ranking member, for their assistance and support.

More importantly, I want to commend the sponsor of this legislation the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN). It is because of his vigorous and stalwart support of this bill and his active participation in moving it forward that we are here today. It has been a pleasure to work with him, and this is a very, very important bill not only for his district and my district, but for many, many districts and many, many States in the Northeast.

I represent Rockland County. We have a pristine area there which is very, very important, and we need to protect this area. We very often talk about suburban sprawl and development, which is unwanted and which would mar this pristine land. This bill gives us the opportunity to balance that. That is what is so important.

The Highlands in my district encompasses an area totally of 1.5 million acres from the lower Hudson River Valley in New York to the Delaware River in New Jersey. Within this area are some spectacular things to see and do, and, of course, many people, 1.4 million people, live within the Highlands area.

The Highlands adjoins a metropolitan area, the New York metropolitan area, with a population of more than 20 million people. More than 11 million people rely on the Highlands' drinking water resources, which serves at least half of New York City's water supply. More than 14 million people visit the Highlands each year for recreational opportunities. Over 240 species of birds,

mammals, amphibians and reptiles depend on Highlands habitat, and more than 160 historical and cultural sites have been identified in the region.

Where once apple farms and bungalows dotted the landscape, we now have 300,000 people living in Rockland County, and as I mentioned before, it is very, very important to have that balance between development and preserving pristine areas such as this.

The Federal Government has an important role to play in protecting our area of national significance here in our own backyard. I have supported increased funding for Forest Service programs such as the Forest Legacy Program, the Forest Stewardship Program and the new Forest Land Enhancement Program that protect environmentally sensitive forestlands such as the Highlands.

Again, I want to say that it is vitally important that the Federal Government facilitate partnerships between all levels of government to protect the Highlands and prevent the region from suffering from further urban sprawl. My district is a combination of an urban district and a suburban district, and I am very, very sensitive to the needs of the suburbs, and this bill and the money put into this bill goes a long way in keeping that balance and keeping these lands pristine.

The Highlands Act will really move us far along in this effort because we do not want further urban sprawl. So I thank the chairs and ranking members and, again, most of all, my friend from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN). This is truly bipartisan and truly a very, very good day for the American people.

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I yield what time he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. POMBO), the chairman of the Committee on Resources.

Mr. POMBO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding me the time.

I come to the floor today to speak in support of this bill. This is the kind of legislation that in the past I have opposed and have had concerns about, but I have to give all due credit to my colleague the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) for the work that they put into this bill.

When they originally introduced this legislation, I had some concerns over it, and they came in and sat down with me, and we were able to work through all of the concerns that I had, and they were very good at coming in and sitting down and working through the property rights concerns that I had, what impact this would have on small property owners that were involved with this area, and gave me the assurances that as we worked our way through this process, that their private property rights would be protected. They were willing to accept language into the bill that protects those small property owners, and I think that that is extremely important.

I will tell my colleagues, on any legislation like this in the future that we choose to move through the Committee on Resources, we will use this bill as a template, as a way to get things done in a bipartisan way in trying to move forward with a Federal and a local partnership in protecting lands that are environmentally sensitive and that are important, but at the same time protecting the property rights of those individual owners, which is something that is extremely important to me.

So I just want to come down here and tell my colleagues I strongly support this legislation. I think that the work that the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SAXTON) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN) did on this is a very, very positive step for the future. I know that they are going to do great things with this. I know that this land is extremely important to them. So I look forward to working with them in future and making sure that these lands are protected, at the same time that small property owners are protected.

So I thank them for all of the great work that they did, and I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCRELL), my good friend and classmate.

Mr. PASCRELL. Mr. Speaker, I rise in very strong support of H.R. 1964, the Highlands Conservation Act.

I want to congratulate the chairmen and ranking members for getting this to the floor, but I want to pay particular attention, and I know he does not like this but I will do it anyway, to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN). This has been a continuation, Mr. Speaker, of his work in the New Jersey State Legislature, not to balance anything, but to secure and preserve lands not only in New Jersey, but to set a model throughout the United States, and I think he has done that, and he has done it in a most professional way.

I am proud to work with my colleagues across the aisle for years to preserve and protect this magnificent sweep of the Appalachian ridges, stretching for 1.5 million acres across New Jersey and New York.

The Highlands are an essential source of drinking water, we have heard that already, clean air, and wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities for nearly 25 million people located right in the backyard of our Nation's most densely populated region. The irony is staring us right in the face.

The Highlands region has been in grave danger throughout the last decade. The region lost 5,200 acres a year to intensive development of strip malls and office campuses. Development also threatens the water supply for millions of residents in New Jersey and endangers critical wildlife.

In land right next to my district, millions of residents enjoy the drinking water and the recreational resources of the Ramapo Mountains, the Wyanokie Highlands and the Pequannock Watershed. This bill will provide millions of dollars in land preservation assistance to protect this core of wilderness in our region.

The Highlands Conservation Act should be a model for future land preservation efforts. We have debated land preservation on this very floor, and yes, we need to have a sensible approach to it and respect, as the gentleman from California pointed out, property rights.

This legislation encourages a strong partnership between the Federal, State and local communities, and the gentleman from New Jersey, my colleague in the State legislature, this has been the center of his work on preservation, and it is fitting, it is fitting on this floor that we salute his efforts, particularly at a time when things can get downright contentious here.

The bipartisan efforts we have made to create innovative legislation that preserves critical land while respecting the rights of property owners should set a standard for this House. Advocates for this bill worked tirelessly with environmentalists and private industry to create a worthy compromise that does a service to the legislative process.

So preservation of the Highlands will benefit all Americans. Indeed, the Highlands is not just a New Jersey resource. As in any other parts in this country, it is a national treasure.

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Again, I want to point out that this bill eliminated the Office of Highlands Stewardship and the accompanied regulatory process. It reduced the authorization level from \$25 million annually to \$10 million annually over 10 years. It focused conservation efforts only on those resources most important. This bill clarified that the bill would not establish a wholly new programmatic category of land use, and, finally, it assured landowners in the Highlands region that private property rights will be protected by including safeguards for those landowners potentially at risk.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a good piece of legislation. It has been developed over a long period of time.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

As stated, we did have some concerns about the expense of the bill and the funding for it, given the limitations of the land and water conservation fund, but we are supportive of the bill.

Mr. HOLT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Highlands Conservation Act.

To anyone in this Congress who questions the value of efforts to preserve open space, I invite them to come to New Jersey. My con-

stituents, like most people around the state, have seen the ills of sprawl and the consequences of poor planning and meager preservation efforts.

Despite the fact that many see rampant commercial and industrial development in New Jersey, however, there are still some wonderful tracts of land left in some areas of our state. One in particular is part of this tract we are trying to save through today's legislation, the Highlands Region. These are important not just for aesthetically pleasing vistas, but especially for the health of our environment, our water, our air, and mostly our people.

The Highlands is an incredible 2 million acre swath across four states—New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. This tract is home to nearly one and a half million people and is still a quick drive away from New York City and other major metropolitan areas.

Even more importantly, the Highlands provides and protects the drinking water supplies for over 15 million people who live in the Philadelphia-New York-Hartford metropolitan area, which cuts right through my central New Jersey district.

That is why it is so important that the House today pass the Highlands Conservation Act. This bill authorizes federal Land and Water Conservation Fund money that will be matched at least one to one by local, state, and private funding. The governors of the four Highlands states will identify which lands are best eligible for conservation efforts, then apply to the federal government for funding. I know that the governor of New Jersey is ready and eager to get to work identifying these areas and preserving more green space in the state.

I also want to highlight provisions in the bill that provide technical assistance to communities and organizations involved in conservation efforts for the Highlands. So many people in the region have already done so much wonderful work to help preserve the area, and they will now get the added benefit of assistance and expertise from the federal government.

I want to recognize Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN for his leadership on this issue and his hard work to get the legislation on the floor. I also want to salute the work of former Representative Ben Gilman, who led the effort on this legislation during the last Congress.

I also want to thank Chairman POMBO, Ranking Member RAHALL, Subcommittee Chairman RADANOVICH, and Ranking Member CHRISTENSEN for helping see this legislation through the Resources committee. This bill means a lot to New Jersey, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. CALVERT) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1964, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to assist the States of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania in conserving pri-

ority lands and natural resources in the Highlands region, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WATER COMMISSION ACT OF 2003

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 135) to establish the "Twenty-First Century Water Commission" to study and develop recommendations for a comprehensive water strategy to address future water needs, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 135

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Twenty-First Century Water Commission Act of 2003".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that—

(1) the Nation's water resources will be under increasing stress and pressure in the coming decades;

(2) a thorough assessment of technological and economic advances that can be employed to increase water supplies or otherwise meet water needs in every region of the country is important and long overdue; and

(3) a comprehensive strategy to increase water availability and ensure safe, adequate, reliable, and sustainable water supplies is vital to the economic and environmental future of the Nation.

SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT.

There is established a commission to be known as the "Twenty-First Century Water Commission" (in this Act referred to as the "Commission").

SEC. 4. DUTIES.

The duties of the Commission shall be to—

(1) use existing water assessments and conduct such additional assessments as may be necessary to project future water supply and demand;

(2) study current water management programs of Federal, Interstate, State, and local agencies, and private sector entities directed at increasing water supplies and improving the availability, reliability, and quality of freshwater resources; and

(3) consult with representatives of such agencies and entities to develop recommendations consistent with laws, treaties, decrees, and interstate compacts for a comprehensive water strategy which—

(A) respects the primary role of States in adjudicating, administering, and regulating water rights and water uses;

(B) identifies incentives intended to ensure an adequate and dependable supply of water to meet the needs of the United States for the next 50 years;

(C) suggests strategies that avoid increased mandates on State and local governments;

(D) eliminates duplication and conflict among Federal governmental programs;

(E) considers all available technologies and other methods to optimize water supply reliability, availability, and quality, while safeguarding the environment;

(F) recommends means of capturing excess water and flood water for conservation and use in the event of a drought;

(G) suggests financing options for comprehensive water management projects and for appropriate public works projects;

(H) suggests strategies to conserve existing water supplies, including recommendations for repairing aging infrastructure; and